

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A vehicle identification center, the center comprising

a frame including a plurality of camera mounting means, the frame defining an open area for positioning the vehicle within the frame;

a plurality of digital cameras, such that at least one camera is mounted on each camera mounting means ;

a Vehicle Identification Number detection means; and

a computer workstation, the workstation having a CPU, a monitor, and a keypad entry device.

2. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein

the Vehicle Identification Number detection means is a bar code scanner.

3. The vehicle identification center of Claim 2 wherein

the bar code scanner is connected to the computer workstation so that the Vehicle Identification Number may be read into the computer.

4. The vehicle identification center of Claim 2 wherein

the bar code scanner is wirelessly connected to the computer workstation so that the

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Vehicle Identification Number may be read into the computer.

5. The vehicle identification center of Claim 2 wherein

the bar code scanner is connected to a palm computer device so that the Vehicle

5 Identification Number may be read into the palm computer device.

6. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 further comprising

at least one vehicle stop location indicator, such that the indicator provides an indication of
the optimum stopping location for a vehicle in the vehicle identification center.

7. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein

the camera mounting means is an adjustable post including a height-adjustment means
such that the height of the camera may be adjusted according to the type of vehicle in the
vehicle identification center.

8. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein

the camera mounting means is a movable post, such that post has at least two wheels.

9. The vehicle identification center of Claim 8 wherein

the camera mounting means has a tripod base, such that the camera mounting means may
be manually moved from one position to another position.

10. The vehicle identification center of Claim 7 wherein
the height-adjustment means is manually operated.

5 11. The vehicle identification center of Claim 7 wherein
the height-adjustment means is motorized and controlled by the computer workstation.

12. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein
the frame is comprised of a plurality of posts and conduit connecting each post to at least
one other post.

13. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein
the frame is comprised of at least one post and an elevated track such that the post
supports the elevated track and the camera mounting means is supported by the elevated
track.

14. The vehicle identification center of Claim 13 wherein
the camera mounting means are movable along the elevated track .

20 15. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein
the cameras are live feed digital cameras.

16. The vehicle identification center of Claim 9 wherein
the camera images are displayed on the computer monitor.

5 17. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein
the computer workstation is a notebook computer.

18. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein
the computer workstation is a palm computer.

19. The vehicle identification center of Claim 1 wherein
the camera mounting means are robotically controlled from the computer workstation
such that the computer workstation may issue a command to move the camera mounting
means from a first position to a second position.

20. A vehicle identification center, the center comprising
a frame, the frame comprising
a first adjustable-height front post, the first post including a computer work
surface, a first digital camera mount, and an electrical connection from the first
camera mount to the computer work surface,
a second adjustable-height front post, the second post including a second digital

camera mount, and an electrical connection from the second camera mount to the computer work surface,

a third adjustable-height rear post, the third post including a third digital camera mount, and an electrical connection from the third camera mount to the computer

work surface, the third post including a pair of wheels which permit movement of the third post, and such that the electrical connection of the third post is an

adjustable-length connection between the first post and the third post, and

a fourth adjustable-height rear post, the fourth post including a fourth digital camera mount, and an electrical connection from the fourth camera mount to the

computer work surface, the fourth post including a pair of wheels which permit movement of the fourth post, and such that the electrical connection of the fourth

post is an adjustable-length connection between the second post and the fourth post,

the first post, second post, third post, and fourth post thereby defining corners of a rectangular working area such that an automotive vehicle may be positioned

within the working area;

a vehicle stop location indicator attached to the frame, such that the indicator provides an indication of the optimum stopping location for a vehicle in the vehicle identification center;

a computer workstation, such that the computer workstation may be placed on the

computer work surface, the computer workstation having a CPU, a monitor, and a keypad entry device;

four digital cameras, such that a camera is mounted on the digital camera mount of each post, such that each camera is connected to the computer workstation so that the monitor will display the camera images; and

a bar code scanner for reading the vehicle's Vehicle Identification Number, such that the bar code scanner is connected to the computer workstation.

21. A vehicle identification center, the center comprising

a means for mounting a digital camera at each of the four corners of a rectangular working space;

a means for adjusting the height of each digital camera;

a means for displaying the images from the digital cameras;

a means for focussing the image from each digital camera;

a means for accepting the image of each camera into a computer database;

a means for indicating the appropriate positioning of a vehicle in the working space;

a means for obtaining the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) of the vehicle and recording the VIN into a computer database;

22. A vehicle identification center, the center comprising

a means for mounting a digital camera at any of the four corners of a rectangular working space;

a means for adjusting the height of each digital camera;

a means for displaying the images from each digital camera;

a means for focussing the image from each digital camera;

a means for accepting the image of each digital camera into a first computer file;

a means for indicating the appropriate positioning of a vehicle in the working space;

5 a means for obtaining the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) of the vehicle and recording the VIN into a second computer file;

a means for consolidating the first computer file and the second computer file into a single computer file stored on a first computer; and

a means for transferring the single computer file to a second computer.

23. A system for obtaining, processing, and transferring vehicle identification information, the system comprising

a first computer which is used to decode a VIN number to produce decoded VIN number vehicle data;

at least one digital camera, such that the digital camera may provide at least one digital image of the vehicle to the first computer;

a monitor in communication with the first computer, the monitor permitting review of the decoded VIN number vehicle data, and permitting review of the digital image of the vehicle; and

20 a communications link between the first computer and a second computer such that the digital image and the decoded VIN number vehicle data are collected, processed, and

transferred from the first computer to the second computer in real time.

24. The system of claim 23 wherein

a bar scanner is in communication with the computer, and the bar scanner is used to

5 provide a VIN number to the computer.

25. The system of claim 23 wherein

there is a bar scanner; and

there is a data collection device which captures a signal from the bar scanner, thereby
10 reading the VIN number, such that the VIN number is later transferred to the computer.

26. The system of claim 23 wherein

an attendant operates the digital camera.

27. A method for updating a vehicle database, the method comprising

capturing at least one image of a vehicle;

reading the vehicle VIN number;

decoding the VIN number to create vehicle data;

combining the image and the vehicle data, such that image is captured and the VIN is

20 read and decoded in real time; and

transferring to at least one database the combined image and the vehicle data.

28. The method of claim 27 wherein

the capturing at of the image of the vehicle is accomplished in an automatic processing center.

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29. A method for updating a vehicle database, the method comprising

driving a vehicle into a processing center, the center comprising a plurality of mounted digital cameras;

inputting the vehicle VIN number into a computer database;

positioning the cameras at appropriate heights for the vehicle;

capturing at least one image of the vehicle into at least one data file;

decoding the VIN number to create vehicle data; and

transferring to at least one database the picture data file and the vehicle data.

30. The method of claim 29 wherein

the database is an automotive dealer database.

31. The method of claim 29 further comprising

accessing the database from the Internet.

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32. The method of claim 29 wherein positioning the cameras at appropriate heights for the

vehicle is performed by

determining an appropriate height from the VIN number; and

automatically adjusting the height.

- 5 33. The method of Claim 29 wherein the step of capturing at least one image of the vehicle into at least one data file is comprised of

capturing a first image;

examining the first image;

determining if the first image is satisfactory; and

if necessary, repeating the following steps until a satisfactory image is obtained:

obtaining a new image if the image is not satisfactory;

examining the new image;

determining if the new image is satisfactory; and

accepting the new image.

34. An improved method for updating a vehicle database with at least one digital image of the vehicle and information derived from the vehicle's VIN number, the improvement comprising

obtaining the digital image with at least one digital camera at the time of initial

processing of the vehicle;

reviewing the quality of the digital image at the time of initial processing of the vehicle;

acquiring an improved digital image if necessary;

obtaining the VIN number with a bar scanner at the time of initial processing of the vehicle;

decoding the VIN number to obtain vehicle data at the time of initial processing of the vehicle;

reviewing the vehicle data derived from the VIN number at the time of initial processing of the vehicle;

preparing at least one data file, the file including the digital image and vehicle data, at a dealer location at the time of initial processing of the vehicle; and

downloading the data file to at least one database at the time of initial processing of the vehicle.